Romesh Chunder Dutt

A SKETCH OF

His Life and Career

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Romesh Chunder Dutt.

STUDY OF A LABORIOUS LIFE.

THE Life of Mr. Romesh Dutt is a record of steady work and noble ambition. It is a record of varied and many-sided suc-esses, achieved by firm courage, tenacious pur-ose, tireless endeavours, and true devotion to his ountry. As a youth of twenty he won his aurels in London at the Examination for the ndian Civil Service ; as an old man of sixty he etains the esteem of his countrymen as a high dministrator, a gifted writer, a true patriot. he life of such a man has its lessons for all.

EARLY YEARS.

Romesh Chunder Dutt comes from a cultured mily of Calcutta which was distinguished even the days of Clive and Warren Hastings. His eat grandfather, Nilmani Dutt, was a kind-arted, broad-minded, distinguished Hindu ader of Calcutta, well known in the latter lf of the Eighteenth Century. His great cle, Rasamoy Dutt, was the first Indian ho held the high posts—first of Principal of

Sanscrit College in Calcutta, and then of Judge of the Court of Small Causes. His father Isan Chunder was one of the first Deputy Collectors in Bengal, when that Service was created for the higher employment of Indians by Lord William Bentinck. Miss Toru Dutt, a cousin of Romesh Dutt, wrote English verses which were much admired in England a generation ago; and several others of the gifted family distinguished themselves in literary pursuits.

Mr. Romesh Dutt was born in Calcutta in 1848 (August 13,) but his early boyhood was mostly passed in many Bengal Districts, where his father was employed as Deputy Collector. Those were pre-railway days, and Mr. Dutt has pleasant recollections of long journeys by land and river, and of many villages and towns and Districts visited in his boyhood. He has recollections too of the rule of the East India Company; he remembers the departure of Lord Dalhousie and the arrival of Lord Canning in Calcutta in 1856; and after the Great Mutiny, he was present with his father at the great gathering in the District of Pubna, when the Proclamation of Queen Victoria was read in 1858, in English and in Bengali, amidst the roar of

cannon and the cheers of the assembled multitude.

Losing his mother and father soon after, young Romesh and his brothers and sisters lived under the guardianship of his uncle, Shashi Chunder, himself a man of literary pursuits and greatly devoted to English literature. Romesh's successes in the university examinations were marked; he was the first of his school at the Matriculation Examination of 1864; and he stood second in order of merit among all the students of the university at the First Examination in Arts held in 1866. But he never graduated;—an event happened which changed his future life and career.

DEPARTURE FOR ENGLAND.

One fine morning in 1868, (March 3,) three Bengali youths left India and sailed for England. One of them, Surendra Nath Banerjea, went with his father's consent; the two others, Bihari Lal Gupta and Romesh Chunder Dutt had simply run away from their homes under the cover of night! We can scarcely realize in these days the risks and the difficulties, the social and caste prohibitions, which young Hindus had to face, forty years ago, before they could cross the sea. We have heard that the three berths in the steamer were engaged in the

name of "Surendra Nath Banerjea and two friends", because the two friends feared to have their names published before they had effected their escape! But they were determined, all three of them, and calmly faced all the risks that lay before them; and it almost seems as if the hand of Destiny impelled them to the bold venture which shaped their future life. The name of Surendra Nath Banerjea is a household word to-day all over India; as a patriot, an orator, and a statesman, he has nobly performed his life's duty. Bihari Lal Gupta has also had a distinguished career, and retired from the Indian Civil Service, full of honours, a few years ago, as a Judge of the High Court of Calcutta. Romesh Chunder Dutt has also retired from the same service, but has won fame and distinction by his varied labours in other lines.

Who could have imagined, over forty years ago, when these three young Bengalis were sailing over the blue ocean on a difficult and arduous venture, that their work, their character, and their life would leave an impress on the history of their native land? Who could have foreseen that they would live to direct the progress of their country?

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All the three succeeded at the Open Competition of 1869. More than three hundred English candidates had appeared at that Examination, but Mr. Dutt won the third place in order of merit; and he stood second among all the English candidates in English Literature. In Sanscrit he easily stood first.

STUDY IN ENGLAND, TRAVELS AND RETURN HOME.

The Indian students found easy introductions to English homes, and Mr. Romesh Dutt was welcomed by many English families. He witnessed the great Parliamentary Election of 1868 which returned the Liberals to power, and Gladstone became Prime Minister for the first time. The young Indian student had admission to the House of Commons, listened to the speeches of Gladstone and Disraeli, and had personal introductions to John Bright and Henry Fawcett, the greatest friends of India in those days. He attended meetings where John Stuart Mill spoke or Charles Dickens gave readings from his novels; he was present at receptions at the India Office, given by the Duke of Argyle then Secretary of State for India; and he made many friends among the eminent Englishmen of those days. Among Professors of the London

University College under whom he studied, he knew Henry Morley and Theodore Goldstücker most intimately; and altogether he carried away with him very pleasant recollections of his first sojourn in England.

He travelled, too, in Scotland and in Ireland, and after passing all his Examinations he left for home with his two friends. They came through France, Germany, Switzerland and Italy, and an incident happened in France which is worth narrating. The War of 1870-1 was just over when the three Indian youths visited Paris in August 1871. The Communists had destroyed most of the fine buildings in that city; the French Government was furious; and French soldiers were shooting down men as Communists on mere suspicion. The three Bengali youths, on the occasion of a visit to Verseilles, were by some strange mistake suspected to be foreign Communists; they were arrested, and had the strange experience of passing a night in a French lockup! The next morning they were taken out for examination; they pointed to their passports and indignantly asserted their rights as British subjects. The first fury of the French officers was over by this time, and they were in a mood

to listen. The officer who questioned the Indian youths was satisfied, and they escaped being shot! If the arrest had taken place a few weeks before, the incident might have ended differently, and India might not have heard anything more of her three venturesome sons!

EARLY OFFICIAL WORK.

For eleven years, from 1871 to 1882, Mr. Romesh Dutt served in various capacities in various Districts in Bengal. His first experience of famine-relief work was in the District of Nadiya in 1874; but a more arduous work was imposed upon him in 1876, when a terrible cyclone and storm-wave swept over south-eastern Bengal, and carried away over a hundred thousand people. Mr. Romesh Dutt was selected to re-organize administration in the island of Dakhin Shahbazpur in the mouths of the Ganges. The whole island was covered with dead bodies like a vast battle field; and dead men and women hung on trees, floated on tanks, and were carried up and down by the tides. A cholera broke out almost immediately which was scarcely less fatal than the cyclone; the looting of property which had been washed away from private homes was a daily occurrence, and a famine

due to the loss of crops ended the tale of disasters. Amidst all these terrible disasters the young officer of five years' standing worked almost single-handed; he rebuilt villages, restored order, relieved the sufferers and re-organized the administration. Peace and prosperity smiled once more on the island before he left.

EARLY LITERARY WORK.

In the midst of official work in various Districts, Mr. Romesh Dutt's pen was not altogether idle even in those early years. He wrote small works in English about his Three Years in Europe, and about the Literature and the Peasantry of his own Province; but his first serious work as an author began with his well-known Bengali Novels. The famous Bankim Chandra Chatterjea, the greatest Bengali writer of the 19th Century, was an intimate friend of Mr. Romesh Dutt. They met one day in Calcutta, and Bankim Chandra urged his young friend to try his hand at Bengali. "Write in Bengali!"—exclaimed the latter,—"but I hardly know the Bengali literary style!" "Style!"—rejoined Bankim,—"why, whatever a cultured man like you will write will be style. If you have the gift in you the style will come of

itself!" Mr. Dutt remembered this conversation and between 1874 and 1880, he produced his four historical Novels in Bengali which are now a part of the permanent literature of Bengal. One of them, *The Slave Girl of Agra,* has lately appeared in English.

DISTRICT MAGISTRATE.

Eleven years had passed since Mr. Romesh Dutt had commenced service. Within this time he had twice acted as District Magistrate for short periods, and other Bengali officers had also acted in such capacity for a few months. Was it safe to place Indians in charge of Districts for long periods? Was it safe to make Indian officers permanent District Magistrates? These uneasy thoughts rose in the minds of many English administrators, and many Anglo-Indian journals scoffed at the idea! Fortunately the question was solved, not by angry controversy, but by fair trial; and Mr. Romesh Dutt was the first Indian officer who held executive charge of a District for a prolonged time. From April 1883 to April 1885, (with a very short interval) he was kept in charge of Barisal, (Backergunj,) the most turbulent and difficult District in Bengal. The time, too, was unfavourable, and race-feelings ran high

during the Ilbert-Bill controversy. But the experiment ended in complete and marked success. The Indian Magistrate worked in perfect harmony with his English subordinates,—Joint and Assistant Magistrates, the Civil Surgeon and the Police Superintendent. He secured peace, and cases of rioting and disturbance in that turbulent District were fewer under his administration than they had been for many years. He won the love and respect of the people, and the Annual Resolutions published in the Government Gazette commended in high terms the results of his rule.

The Marquis of Ripon was then Viceroy of India. He was pleased to send for the Indian Magistrate, and expressed his high approval of his work in a difficult District, and during a time of great tension of race feelings. "I sent for you",—Lord Ripon was pleased to remark,—"as I wished to see you and know you before leaving India. Your work should be known in England; the fitness of Indians for high administrative posts would not then be questioned." It is a pleasure to record that the fitness of Indians to hold charge of Districts has never been questioned since 1885.

THE BENGAL TENANCY ACT.

Perhaps it was a higher gratification to Mr. Romesh Dutt that he was able to render some help towards the final triumph of a cause for which he had laboured for years. Very early in his career, he had written on the condition of the Peasantry of Bengal, and had pointed out the need for some security of their tenures and some fixity of their rents. The book had little influence at the time, and had been scoffed at by Zemindars and ignored by Government, but the writer never lost heart. Many years had not passed, before Government awoke to the necessity of the reforms, and Mr. Dutt had many opportunities of reiterating his arguments and pressing for legislation. Sir Anthony Macdonnell (now Lord Macdonnell), then Revenue Secretary of Bengal, at last took up the work of drafting a Bill. No reports were more valuable to him than those of the young Magistrate of Barisal; no help was more cordially acknowledged by him in the Government Gazette than that of Mr. Romesh Dutt. The Bill was at last passed by Lord Dufferin in the Legislative Council of India; the protection needed by cultivators was secured by the Bengal Tenancy Act of 1885; and Lord

Macdonnell has never since forgotten the services rendered by Mr. Dutt on this occasion in the cause of the voiceless cultivators.

THE RIG-VEDA CONTROVERSY.

After fourteen years of service, Mr. Romesh Dutt took two years' furlough, 1885 to 1887, and the first of these years he spent in India. He at once plunged into literary work, and produced a social Novel which has since been rendered into English under the title of *The Lake of Palms.* But this was mere literary pastime; he entered on a more formidable undertaking when, with the help of some Sanscrit Pundits, he began a Bengali translation of the ancient Hymns of the Rig-Veda. If he had promised himself a quiet and congenial literary work, he found himself mistaken. Orthodoxy took alarm at the prospect of the sacred hymns being laid open to laymen; and the idea of a non-Brahman like Mr. Dutt laying sacrilegious hands on the holiest of holy books raised a perfect storm of opposition. Bengal had seldom witnessed such a violent literary controversy since the days when the venerable Vidyasagar had stood up for the Marriage of Hindu widows and the abolition of Polygamy. Furious articles appeared

week after week in Vernacular newspapers, sarcasm or invective was poured on the devoted head of the daring translator; and the translation itself was condemned and vilified before it had appeared in print! Mr. Dutt faced this opposition in the way in which he has faced all opposition through life. He scarcely deigned to make a reply; he worked silently and laboriously through the hot summer months; and, before the year 1885 was out, his first volume astonished an orthodox world! The very attacks on his book had added to the list of his subscribers; and before he sailed for Europe, early in 1886, the complete translation of the work was in the Press. It is the only complete translation of the Rig-Veda hymns published in the Bengali language.

SECOND VISIT TO EUROPE.

Early in 1886, Mr. Romesh Dutt, accompanied by his wife and children, and also by his elder brother Jogesh Chunder, the laborious translator of the Sanscrit History of Kashmir, sailed for Europe. His old friend Bihari Lal Gupta had preceded him and received him in London. The friendship of these two gifted men, Mr. Romesh Dutt and Mr. Bihari Gupta, is one of the romances

of their life. They had studied in school and college together; they had run away from their homes and passed the Civil Service Examination together; they equally distinguished themselves in service, one in the Executive and the other in the Judicial line; and after their retirement, and in their old age, they remain united by ties of friendship as strong as in their boyish days, half a Century ago. The world were richer if such life-long friendships were more frequently seen.

The English Summer was passed in a quiet seaside place, but Mr. Romesh Dutt wished to see more of the world. First he made a trip to the North Cape, and travelled through the delightful countries of Norway and Sweden; and later on he made a prolonged tour through the Continent of Europe. Deeply read in Mediæval European History, he visited with intense interest many towns of mediæval fame in Belgium and Holland, Austria and Germany; and at Berlin he saw the aged German Emperor, one of the builders of the modern German Empire. Striking through Tyrol, he then travelled in the classic land of Italy. Pisa and Bologna and Florence, Rome and Naples, recalled ancient associations; the ruins of Herculaneum and Pompii were explored, the crater

of Visuvius was seen. Venice and Milan had been visited before, and so the traveller returned by way of Genoa to France, and thence to England. Shortly after he returned with his family to India.

HISTORICAL WORK ON ANCIENT INDIA.

On rejoining work after leave, Mr. Romesh Dutt was posted for a short time to Pubna, where he was reminded of the days of his boyhood; and then was transferred to Mymensingh, perhaps the heaviest District in Bengal. It is a vast District with a population of nearly four millions; and Mr. Dutt was sent there when the indiscreet acts of a Senior English Collector had embittered feelings between Hindus and Mahomedans. Within a few months the breach was healed, and peace was restored.

For two years and-a-half, Mr. Romesh Dutt worked in this heavy District. His administration was marked by repression of crime, increase of prosperity among the people, and by a great development of roads and communications,—the new District Boards and Sub-District Boards working satisfactorily under his sympathetic guidance. One would think such heavy work would suffice for any officer, but what

is bred in the bone will not come out of the flesh, and Mr. Romesh Dutt undertook and completed, in this District, what is perhaps his greatest literary work.

The translation of the Rig-Veda hymns had first inspired him with the idea of writing a History of Ancient India, based on Sanscrit Literature and the researches of European Scholars. A few essays from his pen had already appeared, but it was now that he fairly began the Herculean task. Huge packages of books of reference arrived from Calcutta, as there was no suitable local library; and when the District Officer went on his river tours in the rains, his boat was stocked and loaded with manuscripts, books, and proof sheets! Without a moment to spare during the day, he often worked after dinner till past midnight, and sometimes the grey light of the dawn came to him as a surprise, and sent him hastily to bed. It was rash, it was risky, to overwork thus, but the determination, the passion of writing a history of his own country, impelled him to his labours, and the book at last appeared in three volumes, between 1888 and 1890. It is called *Civilisation in Ancient India*, and remains to this day the only com-

plete and comprehensive history of Ancient India in the English language. An edition appeared in London a few years later, and several editions have been published and sold in India.

DECORATION.

In 1890, Mr. Romesh Dutt was transferred to Burdwan; and as the Maharaja of Burdwan was then a minor, the Collector had to look after his education and his estate. From Burdwan he went to Dinajpur, and then to the heavy District of Midnapore, of which he remained in charge for nearly two years. His long and meritorious service in some of the most important Districts in Bengal, as well as his brilliant literary work, was known to Government, and in 1892, Mr. Romesh Dutt was made a *Companion of the Indian Empire.*

But his arduous work at Mymensingh and Midnapore, as well as the malarial climate of Burdwan and Dinajpur, had told on his health; and in the autumn of 1892 he was compelled to take furlough again.

THIRD VISIT TO EUROPE.

During that autumn and winter, he visited Kashmir and Mussourie and Hurdwar and other places in Northern India with his friend

Mr. Bihari Lal Gupta; and early in 1893 he sailed for Europe.

The inclement spring of England brought about a fresh attack of the malaria he had contracted in Burdwan, and for weeks he was confined to his room in the seaside place of Bournemouth. A story is told that, even on his sick bed, he went on revising his books, till his English landlady had to remove all his papers and books from his bedside! Recovering from this attack, he proceeded to Germany, and went through a course of mineral baths and mineral drinks at Wiesbaden. He amused himself there with German grammars and easy readers, but never made much progress in that language. With French he is more familiar. French historians are his constant companions, and he thinks they have a clearer and a more philosophic grasp of the sequence of events, and the character of the ages they describe, than English historians. It is a defect, Mr. Romesh Dutt thinks, in the Indian system of high education, that the European Modern languages are neglected. It is not possible to study any subject thoroughly,—History, Science, or even Indian Antiquities,—unless one knows English, German and French.

DIVISIONAL COMMISSIONER.

Restored to his usual strength and health Mr. Romesh Dutt returned to India in 1893. And it was about this time, we think, that he founded the *Bangiya Sahitya Parishad*, or the Academy of Bengali Literature, now one of the most flourishing and useful literary institutions in India. But it was his administrative career which excited intense interest at this period. He had done 22 years' service, and had established his reputation as a strong, sound, and thoroughly efficient officer. His opinion and judgment were valued by Government on large questions of administration; his sympathies with the cultivating and labouring classes were known; his work in difficult Districts under difficult circumstances had been uniformly successful. "He is perilously near a Commissionership!"—remarked many an Englishman with bated breath. "Will he be passed over for a Commissionership?"—asked his countrymen in their own circles. We have heard that the question went up, in some shape or other, to the India Council at Whitehall, and it was the view held there that the Indian Officer should not be passed over if he was fit. Accordingly, when the time came, Mr. Romesh

Dutt was appointed Commissioner of Burdwan Division in April 1894; and he was the only Indian who rose to the rank of a Commissioner of a Division, in all India, in the Nineteenth Century.

There was an English Collector who, by seniority, was entitled to the Commissioner's post before Mr. Romesh Dutt. But he was not in strong health, and was otherwise not considered quite fit for a Commissioner's work. Mr. Dutt was promoted over his head, and the senior officer served under Mr. Dutt as one of the Collectors in the Division. It speaks well of the loyalty of the Civil Service that the most amicable relations always subsisted between the two officers. And it also speaks well of that service that, during all the years that Mr. Romesh Dutt was Commissioner, first of Burdwan and then of Orissa, there never was any serious misunderstanding or friction between him and the European Collectors who served under him.

It was when he was Commissioner of Burdwan that Mr. Romesh Dutt was appointed a Member of the Bengal Legislative Council. His great experience in District work enabled him to render much help in District questions, which the then Lieutenant Governor of Bengal, Sir

Charles Elliott, gracefully acknowledged on more than one occasion. But he had to resign his Membership when he went to the more distant Division of Orissa, as there was no railway connection then between Orissa and Calcutta.

The Commissioner of Orissa is also *ex-officio* Superintendent of some twenty Native States called the Orissa Tributary Mahals. And Mr. Romesh Dutt was appointed to this *quasi*-political appointment over the head of a senior English Officer who was not considered quite fit for the work.

Both in Burdwan and in Orissa, the first Indian Commissioner maintained the high reputation he had won by his long previous work. Early in1897 he went again on furlough ; and in October of the same year, after a service of 26 years, he retired from the Indian Civil Service.

RETIREMENT FROM SERVICE.

Much surprise was felt at Mr. Romesh Dutt's retirement after 26 years' service, when under the rules of the service he might have continued nine years more. His best friends thought that he had taken an unwise step in leaving a service so honourable, so well paid, and holding out prospects so rich. And the general public whispered that he must have retired under some feeling of dis-

satisfaction at some unfair treatment. Those who have heard him speak on the subject know that these last rumours were absolutely without any foundation. Mr. Dutt was treated with perfect fairness throughout the period of his service; he was never once passed over in the regular line of promotion; and on two occasions, as stated before, he was promoted over the heads of his seniors. More than this, his good work was prominently recognized; even his mistakes were treated with indulgence; he was never once seriously found fault with. He retired from the service with the most lively sense of the fairness and the courtesy of the Government he had served.

The true reasons for his early retirement were two. In the first place he wished to devote himself whole-heartedly to literary pursuits which he always called his "first love." He had formed the ambition of leaving some durable works behind him, which his countrymen would value, even after his death. He was in the fiftieth year of age and had earned his pension; and he decided to devote the remaining years of his life to earning literary fame rather than to earning a fortune, to serve *Saraswati* rather than to serve *Lakshmi*!

In the second place he wished for greater independence and larger opportunities to strive for that progress in self-government and those liberal Reforms for which the time was ripe. His long experience in administration had convinced him that British Rule in India could be more efficient and more popular by the admission of the people to a share in the control and direction of that administration. And he felt an irresistible impulse to take a part in the national endeavour to secure this share for his countrymen.

These were the two motives which led to his early retirement from service. The general public did not then believe that such dreamy reasons could have induced Mr. Dutt to sever himself from a fine career in a fine service. But those who have watched his career, since 1897, will now admit that he decided rightly in obeying the impulses which he felt within himself.

PROLONGED STAY IN EUROPE.

For seven years, from the early months of 1897 to the commencement of 1904, Mr. Romesh Dutt was mostly in England. Twice within this period he came to India, once to the Lucknow Congress of 1899, and again in 1902; but most of his work

during these seven years, literary and political, was work done in England.

Mr. Romesh Dutt's wife and youngest daughter accompanied him to England in 1897; his only son had preceded him in the previous year. The young man was admitted to Christ Church, Oxford, where he eventually took his degree, and afterwards came out to India as a Barrister. Mr. Dutt himself was appointed Lecturer on Indian History at University College, London; and he lectured on that subject for a number of years before many English students, including selected candidates for the Indian Civil Service. He also co-operated with Mr. Dadabhai Naoroji and Mr. W. C. Bonnerjee in all endeavours for the reform of Indian administration; and his paper on the Separation of the Judicial and Executive functions in India, published as far back as 1893, brought the question into prominence.

Both Mr. Dadabhai Naoroji and Mr. W. C. Bonnerjee were Mr. Dutt's seniors. Dadabhai was then over seventy years of age, and his long, disinterested, and patriotic labours had endeared his name to all Indians. He had been Member of the House of Commons from 1892 to 1895;

but whether in the House or outside, his efforts were unremitting, his energy was inexhaustible. And even those who differed from him in some of his views respected and loved him for the noble disinterestedness of his public work, and the beauty and purity of his private life.

Mr. W. C. Bonnerjee was not quite fifty-five then, and still practised in Calcutta; but every year he spent long months in his house in Croydon near London, where his family lived. He kept himself in touch with English life and English politics; and with his strong intellect and high abilities, his vigorous grasp of Indian questions and lucid exposition of Indian problems, he did yeoman's service to the Indian cause.

They and Mr. Romesh Dutt were the three leaders of the Indian party in London,—earnest devoted men who laboured in England for the Indian cause in the closing years of the Nineteenth Century.

THE INDIAN EPICS.

But Mr. Romesh Dutt never lost sight of his literary pursuits. Ancient Sanscrit Literature was his favourite study, and he conceived the bold idea of presenting the two ancient Epics of India, the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*, in

a readable form to the modern world. His plan was not to give a condensed version, but to make a full and literal translation of the essential portions of the epics, and to link them together by short explanatory notes. He tried several English metres, till he hit on the one most closely resembling the sanscrit *Anustubh* metre; and he laboured for years together till he completed this self-imposed task. He consulted Professor Max Müller while his work was still in progress; and the venerable Oxford Scholar wrote back that it was scarcely possible to present within readable limits even the main story of the *Mahabharata* an epic of ninety-thousand verses! Mr. Dutt, however, quietly went on with his work, and when the *Mahabharata* was completed, he presented a copy of it to the Oxford Professor. Dr. Max Müller was so charmed and astonished with the result, that he readily consented to write an Introduction. It is a valuable little essay, all the more valuable because it was one of the last things that Professor Max Müller lived to write.

Mr. Romesh Dutt had wisely arranged to issue his metrical translations in the well-known Temple Classics series. They were much appreciated in England and America, and 15,000 copies

of the *Mahabharata* and 10,000 copies of the *Ramayana* were sold in a few years. Mr. Dutt's purpose was fulfilled; the ancient Indian Epics were made known to the modern world. We understand they will shortly be issued in the still more popular series, known as Everyman's Library, in which numerous Classical works have already appeared.

CONGRESS OF 1899.

Throughout the years 1898 and 1899 Mr. Romesh Dutt was invited to speak on Indian subjects on many English platforms; and he succeeded to some extent, in arousing an interest in the state of India, then in the throes of a famine, a plague, and a frontier war. One of the first speeches he delivered was in support of Lord Fitzmaurice, brother of Lord Lansdowne, who was seeking Parliamentary election in the Liberal interest. Mr. Dutt's speeches were valued, more for their lucid and vigorous exposition of facts and arguments, than for any flights of eloquence or rhetoric; and he established a reputation as a safe and trustworthy and sound exponent of Indian views. His countrymen read his speeches with delight, and hailed this new advocate of the Indian cause, so strong in facts,

so rich in official experience and knowledge. And towards the close of 1899 they bestowed upon him the highest honour in their power by electing him President of the Congress which was to be held at Lucknow.

Thousands of his countrymen, who had only known him by name or by his works, saw him for the first time when he stood on the Congress platform in December 1899. He had passed the age of fifty, but his tall figure and vigorous erect form struck his audience. He did not belie their expectations; and he gave almost a new turn to Congress politics when he pleaded vigorously for the cultivators and landed classes of India, exposing the excessive and uncertain assessments on land which necessarily led to chronic agricultural poverty and accentuated frequent famines. Mr. Dutt's Congress speech was a virtual declaration of war against excessive land assessments in India; and those who knew him felt that he meant to fight.

CONTROVERSY WITH LORD CURZON.

Mr. Romesh Dutt had a long audience with Lord Curzon on his return to Calcutta, and he pressed two points before the Viceroy. In the first place he pleaded for some reasonable limits

to the Government demand from land, both in Ryotwari and in Zemindari tracts,—limits which would control the operations of Settlement Officers, and could be enforced by impartial tribunals. Lord Curzon listened courteously to the facts and arguments urged, promised to give them consideration, but was not prepared to give an immediate reply. In the second place Mr. Dutt pleaded for some share for his countrymen in the control and direction of the administration, some room in the Executive Councils of the Viceroy and of the Provinces. There was some debate on this point, and Lord Curzon ended the debate by asking the question which he has often asked since :—" After all, is not the rule of *one man* the best form of rule for India ? "

The brilliant young Viceroy, who governed India for seven years, failed to see then, as he fails to see to this day, that it is this one-man-rule, in Districts, and in Provinces, which leads to arbitrary acts and oppression; which leads to widespread dissatisfaction and discontent ; which has ultimately led to sedition, anarchy and crime ! Lord Curzon fails to see to this day that the age of one-man-rule has passed away over the whole civilized world ; that there is no good govern-

ment on earth without representation; that the well-being of the Indian Empire itself depends on conceding some representation to the people.

Mr. Romesh Dutt had begun the war, and meant to proceed to the end. He followed up his verbal representations with those *Open Letters* on Land Assessments in India which have now become historic. Returning to England, he published these *Open Letters* in the shape of a book, with a vast deal of additional information compiled from Blue Books which was a revelation to most readers in India. Furthermore, he associated himself with a number of high Anglo-Indian administrators who had retired from India rich in renown and experience, and on the 20th December, 1900, they jointly presented a Memorial to the Secretary of State for India demanding reasonable restrictions on land assessments in India.

The India Government was thus forced to make a reply. The reply came in Lord Curzon's famous Resolution on the Land Revenue Policy of India in January, 1902. No enquiries as to the condition of the cultivators had been made; no Commission had been appointed; no evidence had been taken. Lord Curzon

thought it enough, on this grave and momentous question, affecting the welfare of the entire agricultural population of India, simply to put forward the opinions of officials as a conclusive reply! But even so, the reply has its value. It admitted certain definite principles in the matter of Land Assessments for which Mr. Dutt and his colleagues had contended. It laid down certain authoritative rules regulating future assessments. It was a document which could henceforth be appealed to for fulfilment of the pledges it contained. In so far the result of the controversy was satisfactory.

ECONOMIC HISTORY OF BRITISH INDIA.

But if Lord Curzon had hoped to have the last word in this famous controversy, he had mistaken his opponent. Mr. Romesh Dutt had not been idle after the publication of his *Open Letters* and the submission of the Memorial. He had put forth all his energies on the task he had undertaken. He had collected a vast library of Indian Blue Books, dating from the commencement of British Rule in India, and consisting of over two-hundred bound bulky volumes. He had ransacked these invaluable records, and studied the history of Land Settlements and Industries,

and the Finances of India. And he prepared an exhaustive *Economic History* of India from the date of the Battle of Plassey to the dawn of the 20th Century. The great work appeared in two volumes, the first in 1902 and the second in 1904. It was the crowning work of Mr. Romesh Dutts' patience, industry, and literary ability. It was a lucid history of the industries, trades and manufactures of India. It was the last word on the history of Land Settlements. Lord Curzon's Land Resolution is scarcely read to-day except for official reference. Mr. Romesh Dutt's *Economic History* has already passed through two or three editions, and is studied by every Indian desirous of knowing the Economic condition and history of the people of India.

The machinery of the Indian Government moves slow; but nevertheless, since the publication of Mr. Romesh Dutt's *Open Letters* and *Economic History*, some of the evils pointed out have been remedied. Government has become more alive to the duty of encouraging Indian industries and manufactures. Land assessments have been reduced in many Districts. The habit of looking for increase of revenue from each recurring settlement has been abandoned. Rules for the

remission of taxation on the failure of crops have been proclaimed and forced on unwilling Governments like that of Bombay. The burden which had lain heavy on the cultivators of the soil has thus been somewhat lightened. But the great principle that there should be no enhancement of the Government Demand in the absence of specific and tangible reasons, such as were laid down by Lord Ripon, has not yet been proclaimed. And the security which has been given to cultivators in Zemindari tracts by Tenancy Acts has not yet been given to cultivators in Ryotwari tracts, where the Government is virtually the landlord. It is said that these questions are still engaging the attention of the Indian Government. Agricultural India will know no rest till agriculture is secured from uncertain and excessive demands.

BARODA ADMINISTRATION.

After seven years of arduous, incessant, and not unsuccessful work, done mostly in England, Mr. Romesh Dutt returned to India early in 1904. He had passed the age of 55 years, but rest was not for such men as he. One of the most enlightened Princes of India, the Gaekwar of Baroda, had watched the career of this earnest worker, had

studied his books, and on more than one occasion had welcomed him to the Palace of Baroda as his guest. And now, when Mr. Dutt returned to Calcutta, he received a message from the Gaekwar inviting him to take a share in the administration of Baroda. Such an invitation,—to help in the administration of one of the foremost Native States,—Mr. Dutt could not refuse. And from August 1904 to July 1907,—for three years,—Mr. Romesh Dutt was Revenue Minister of Baroda.

The results of his three years' administration are shown in the Annual Reports of the State, but some of them will bear recapitulation. It was on Mr. Romesh Dutt's advice that the Gaekwar made large remissions of outstanding arrears of land revenue, to the extent of over thirty lakhs; and a vast burden which had weighed down the cultivators was thus removed. Taxes on various professions, paid mostly by poor artisans, traders and even labourers, were abolished; and an Income Tax, payable by the richer classes was imposed. The minimum of taxable income was proposed to be Rs. 150, a year; but it was raised successively to Rs. 300, Rs. 500, and then to Rs. 750, before Mr. Dutt left

Baroda. A whole series of customs duties, harassing to trade, were done away with, and duties were limited to a few principal articles which brought a substantial income without detriment to trade. Octroi duties were abolished in all small towns in the State. And it is remarkable that in Baroda, as in larger countries this reduction of duties actually brought in an enlarged revenue, as it led to an expansion of business and trade.

Great encouragement was given to industries and industrial enterprises, and State competition with private Companies was abolished. The State Cotton Mill of Baroda was sold to a private Company, and two other cotton mills sprang up within a short time. A great number of new cotton-ginning factories and various other factories also rose under the impetus given by the new administration. The demand for labour increased accordingly; wages rose; and the condition of the labouring classes was thus improved.

The revenue and judicial services were improved and graded, and none but graduates were ordinarily admitted to these gazetted services. A complete separation of the Judicial and Executive services was effected; and Judicial, (not

Executive) officers have tried both civil and criminal cases in Baroda for some years now, without any detriment to administration. Mr. Dutt believed in tours and inspections; he inspected all the Districts and nearly all the Talukas himself; and he insisted on most of the local work being done locally, rather than at Head Quarters.

He built up a complete system of Self-Government from the bottom to the top. Village Boards were re-organized in all villages in the State, and were entrusted with powers of Village Administration. Groups of these Village Boards elected Members for the Taluka Boards, and the Taluka Boards returned Members to the District Boards. The proceeds of the Local Cess were handed over to these Boards, and local public works, small primary schools, and other duties were entrusted to them. Numerous wells for drinking water were constructed year after year from this fund by the Village Boards themselves; and the success with which the villagers constructed such works for themselves surpassed the expectations of the officers, and showed the fitness of villagers when they were trusted. An Executive Council supervised the entire administration of the State; and an Advisory Legisla-

tive Council, consisting partly of elected Members, has since been formed.

Lastly the great idea of free and compulsory Primary Education throughout the State was initiated by the Gaekwar himself, by orders issued by him from Europe, where he saw such education established. These orders were faithfully carried out; and to-day there are schools in almost all villages in the State, and boys and girls within certain ages are compelled to attend under penalty for absence.

When, after his labours of three years, Mr. Romesh Dutt left Baroda in July 1907, all classes felt that they were losing a friend, a friend of the poor (*Daridra ka Dost*) as he was called. In the speeches which were made on this occasion, allusion was also made to the social functions into which Mr. Dutt had thrown himself, with the ladies of his family, wholeheartedly. Hindu, Mahomedan and Parsee ladies, Gujratis, Mahrattas, and Jains thronged the Revenue Minister's festive halls; and the fair singers sang Urdu or Bengali, Gujrati or Mahratta songs, accompanied by instruments which they often brought themselvest *Garba* dances were performed under the brigh.

autumn moon in the *Garba* season, and amateur theatrical performances sometimes lasted till midnight. It is doubtful if such gatherings,—so joyous and so cosmopolitan in their character,—have ever been held elsewhere in India!

Those who know Mr. Romesh Dutt as a strenuous worker and an indefatigable writer know only half the man. Those who have seen him in his cheerful home at Baroda or Calcutta with a hearty greeting for every guest,—those who have watched him at games with his children and grand-children, himself as merry and boisterous as any one of them,—appreciate the whole man. It is his capacity for mirth which braces up his capacity for work; it is his childlike buoyancy of spirits that inspires his robust optimism. It may truly be said of him that he never knows when he is beaten!

DECENTRALIZATION COMMISSION.

If Mr. Romesh Dutt hoped for retirement when he left Baroda on long leave, he was disappointed. He was spending a few days quietly with his friend Mr. Bihari Lal Gupta at Simultala, when the papers announced that he was appointed a Member of the Royal Commission on Decentralization. Mr. Dutt had however

already planned a tour in Southern India; and he visited the interesting Native States of Mysore, Cochin and Travancore, receiving the utmost kindness and hospitality from the Rulers and Officers of those states. He then pursued his tour as far as Rameswaram. Hundreds of young men at Trichinopoly and Madura, Tanjore and Kumbaconum, heard him speak; and a thousand assembled at Pachaiyappa College, Madras, when he made his great speech there on the study of Indian History. Mr. Dutt then hurried to Bombay, and met his colleagues on the Commission in November 1907.

The Commission came from Bombay to Madras, and commenced their arduous labours. From Madras they went to Burma, and thence to Bengal, the Central Provinces and the United Provinces. After a brief rest they proceeded to Bombay, Sindh, Baluchistan and the N. W. Frontier Province, and finished with Simla and the Punjab. Everywhere they took voluminous evidence, both of official and non-official witnesses; and in April 1908 they proceeded to England to discuss and deliberate, and to frame their Report.

The Report of the Royal Commission has now been published, and our readers can consult it

for themselves. We need only remark that, while the Commission have made many excellent suggestions for improving the administration and broadening the basis of government, they have, at the same time, made some retrograde and very undesirable recommendations, tending to increase the autocratic and almost irresponsible powers of Commissioners and Collectors. We are glad to find that Mr. Romesh Dutt has cordially agreed with his colleagues in all liberal recommendations, and has vigorously dissented from them in those that are illiberal.

A few illustrations will elucidate the foregoing remarks. The Commission recommend:

That the principles of Land Revenue Assessments should be settled by law, instead of being left to executive order (252).

That the levy of water-rates should be left to Provincial Governments under general principles prescribed by the Indian Government (253).

That amendments in the Forest Law and the Police Law should be left to Provincial Legislation (311 & 351).

That Government in the larger Provinces should consist of a Governor and not less than four Members,—including qualified Indian Members (443).

That Boards of Revenue should be absorbed in such enlarged Councils, and in Madras territorial Commissioners should be appointed (469 & 474).

That Commissioners should have some control over the work of all Departments (Education, Public Works, &c.,) within their Divisions, and should hold Provincial Conferences to which non-officials should be admitted (488 & 523).

That Collectors should have a weighty voice over the distribution of irrigation water, and District Forest Officers should be considered as Assistants to Collectors (544 & 553).

That the Sub-Divisional system should be universally applied, and Sub-Divisional Officers should live in their Sub-Divisions (582 & 591).

That in Madras, Tahsildars should not be selected from the clerical ranks; and in Bengal they should be placed in charge of circles answering to Talukas in other Provinces (600 & 601).

That village Panchayets should be created, and should decide petty cases, execute minor village works, maintain village schools, and manage fuel and fodder reserves, (700 to 720).

That District and Sub-District Boards should have a substantial majority of Elected Members (789).

That Municipal Councils should have a substantial majority of Elected Members, and should ordinarily elect Non-Official Chairmen (849 to 852).

These dozen instances of recommendations, made unanimously by all the Members of the Commission, will indicate the liberal and excellent character of the general conclusions of the Royal Commission. We are constrained however to add a few instances of their reactionary and retrograde findings, and the substance of Mr. Dutt's reasons for dissenting from them.—

The majority of the Commission recommend :—

That a general Delegation Act should be passed, empowering Government to alter Legislative Acts by Executive Notifications, in order to delegate to lower officials such powers as are reserved by the Acts to higher officials. [Mr. Dutt considers such a General Delegation Act bad in principle, unkown in any part of the British Empire, dangerous in India, and a breach of faith if applied in altering Acts already in existence (416).]

That Commissioners should have the power to invest first-class Magistrates and Sub-Divisional Officers with criminal appellate powers, and should also appoint Tahsildars. [Mr. Dutt thinks that to confer criminal appellate powers to first-class Magistrates and Sub-Divisional Officers generally would create alarm and endanger justice; and to invest Commissioners with powers to appoint Tahsildars would lead to favouritism and a deterioration of the service (512, 516 & 590).]

That Advisory Councils are not needed in Districts. [Mr. Dutt contends that the present system of District Administration, which is a one-man-rule is the real cause of much discontent in India; that an Advisory Council in each District, with some provision to help the Collector in his work, would make administration more efficient and popular (534).]

That the Collector should always be President of the District Board. [Mr. Dutt points to Lord Ripon's Resolution of 1882 directing that official control on Boards should be exercised from outside and not inside; and urges that there is, and can be, no *Self-Government* in India if people are not trusted to manage local matters free from official control inside the Boards (795).]

These instances will be enough for our purpose. They show the watchful care and the jealous regard for the welfare of his countrymen with which Mr. Romesh Dutt laboured on the Commission. We regret that only one Indian Member found place on the Commission; but we are thankful to Lord Morley that the Indian Member he selected was Mr. Romesh Dutt, so strong, so able, so experienced, so eminently qualified to voice the views and opinions of his countrymen.

LORD MORLEY'S REFORMS.

It was a fortunate circumstance that Mr. Romesh

Dutt was in London all through the summer and autumn of 1908; and his labours on the Commission did not prevent him from taking an active interest in the scheme of Reforms which Lord Morley was preparing for India. Lord Morley himself was ever ready to see and consult all well-informed men, Englishmen or Indians, who could speak from personal experience on Indian questions and Indian administration. Mr. Dutt also interviewed some Members of the House of Lords, including Lord Courtney and Lord Macdonnell whom he had known for many years. He discussed reform proposals with Members of the India Council; and he was in close touch with several Members of the House of Commons who took an active interest in Indian affairs. All through the summer and autumn of 1908 he exerted himself personally, and through friends, to secure some real reforms for India, to secure some share for Indians in the control and direction of Indian Administration.

In all this work Mr. Romesh Dutt laboured hand in hand with Mr. Gokhale who was doing yeoman's service in the same great cause. No two men were better suited to work together in such a cause than Mr. Romesh Dutt and

Mr. Gokhale. Both moderate in their views, practical in their aims and methods, accurate and well-informed in facts, tenacious and persevering in their endeavours,—they were in complete agreement in their opinions, and were often strangely similar in their style of expression. Both of them had been Presidents of the Indian National Congress, and both were listened to with attention as to the reasonable demands of their countrymen. Mr. Romesh Dutt had now counted sixty years, Mr. Gokhale was a little over forty; but the elder and the younger man worked as fast friends in 1908, as they have ever done in life, in the cause of their common motherland.

The Reforms came at last; and, except in the matter of separate elections by Hindus and Mahomedans, have given general satisfaction. The agitation for separate election was more an Anglo-Indian than a Mahomedan agitation. Retired Anglo-Indian officials pleaded more strenuously for it than Muslims; the Tory papers gave greater space to this agitation than they had given to any Indian question since the Mutiny; and the *Times* fought as strenuously for the separation of the Hindus and Mahomedans in India, as it had fought for the sepa-

ration of the Northern and Southern States in America, half a century before! The reasons too were similar. British statesmen conceived that British power was safer in India if Hindus and Mahomedans were divided: and British historians proclaimed the dirty doctrine that the security of British rule in India rested on the antagonism between the various races and religious sects in the country! * The doctrine is the reverse of truth, because such antagonism creates political danger in India, and the security of British rule rests on its impartiality and equal treatment of all races. But the British agitation to divide and rule succeeded, and separate elections were decreed. How far they will benefit either of the sects, thus divided, time will shew.

Mr. Romesh Dutt returned to India in March 1909. After a few months' rest, he rejoined work at Baroda at the expiration of the long leave which the Gaekwar had granted him. He is the Prime Minister of that State to-day, and

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* The Mahomedans, who joined with the Hindus in the Mutiny of 1857, together with the Sikhs who at that time remained loyal to the British, held aloof from the Hindus in 1907. The security of British rule in India rests on this antagonism between the various races and religious sects in the country, &c &c. *The Historians History of the World*, Vol. XXI. p. 668.

21960

the people of the State rejoice to find that able and veteran administrator once more at the head of affairs.

CONCLUSION.

We have tried in the above pages to give a clear and lucid sketch of the life of the indefatigable worker, but we are not sure that we have succeeded. It is his many-sided endeavours which puzzle us; it is his varied successes which bewilder us! But perhaps we understand him best if we regard him under the triple character of an Administrator, a Patriot, and an Author. As an Administrator, both in Bengal and in Baroda, he ranks with the highest of his generation. As a Patriot, too, he takes his stand in the esteem of his countrymen with the greatest of his contemporaries. As an Author in English he has scarcely a peer to-day among his countrymen. His *Ancient India*, his *Indian Epics*, and his *Economic History* will be valued by our posterity as they are valued by us. Works like these, written by Indians for Indians, form and mould the mind of a nation; for they inspire a legitimate pride in the past, a self-respect in the present, a bold but not vainglorious confidence in our destiny in the future.

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